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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the history of sabbatical leave in secondary and postsecondary education, as well as contemporary research on sabbatical leave, and offers some personal narratives of the sabbatical experience. It explains that sabbatical leave programs began at Harvard University in 1880, with professors granted a year of leave at half-pay every seventh year. By the early 1930s, 178 institutions had started this practice. Contemporary research on sabbatical leave suggests that it is a positive tool for enhancing faculty morale; that it allows faculty to study, carry out research, and travel; and that it has a positive impact on the institution. Narratives on the sabbatical have stressed the creative, rewarding nature of the experience; the ability it allows to acquire an advanced degree or a new language; and its rejuvenating effects. It is concluded that sabbatical leaves have a justifiable place in education when viewed as a form of faculty development, and that sabbaticals can make a difference in faculty career life-stages. (Contains 24 references.) (MDM)

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An Overview of the Sabbatical Leave in Higher Education: A Synopsis of the Literature Base

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Abstract

Sabbatical leaves can be powerful stimuli for faculty to improve their performance, and can also be seen as a political favor granted for exceptional service to loyal faculty members. The current literature based synopsis provides a history of the sabbatical leave in higher education, an overview of contemporary research on the sabbatical leave, and an identification of several narratives on the sabbatical leave. Research findings suggest that while the sabbatical leave is generally considered a positive tool for enhancing faculty morale, the outcomes of the sabbaticals tend to be of a summative nature and lacking in empirical assessment data procedures.

The faculty is a major component of any higher education institution. Faculty vitality and quality, in teaching, research, and service, exert a considerable influence on the vitality and quality of an institution, and are fundamental to the achievement of the institution's goals for excellence. According to Clark and Corcoran (1989), faculty and institutional vitality are interrelated concepts, and the well being of one inevitably affects the other. Clark and Corcoran also argued that in addition to personal intelligence and personality, faculty career vitality is affected by professional socialization, organizational structure, and organizational conditions, which are improved and enhanced by faculty vitality. While addressing the shared responsibility of both the faculty member and the institution for assuring career growth and faculty development, they contended that individual faculty renewal rather than institutional renewal has been and continues to be the primary emphasis of higher education institutions.

How a faculty member is prepared and inducted into a professional career, and how the faculty member is developed and maintains excellence, have a close, significant relationship to the success or failure of the institution. This success is achieved through faculty quality and vitality, faculty commitment to duties, and faculty loyalty to the institution (Dayhaw-Baker, 1994).

Research has shown that after teaching for several consecutive years, faculty have demonstrated lower levels of satisfaction and increased feelings of burnout (Gaziel, 1995). This, in turn, has intensified the need for maintaining high levels of qualified faculty, a consistent, crucial concern of higher education institutions. One of the most effective and efficient ways to assure faculty quality and vitality is to provide faculty development programs which enhance faculty professional skills and academic growth in either their specific disciplines or relevant fields that increase the quality and image of the institution.

As an important means of faculty development widely available to faculty in higher education, the sabbatical leave has been argued to play a significant role in enhancing teaching effectiveness, enlarging scholarly productivity, strengthening academic programs, and developing a faculty's sense of commitment and loyalty to their employing institutions. Because of the clearly defined purposes, the allowance of free time without interruption from daily routine work, and the awarding of full or partial salary as a vital part of the arrangement between faculty and the institution (Zahorski, 1994), faculty can concentrate efforts to achieve specific goals designed for personal academic development or fulfillment in their fields, not only adding to the achievement of their own, in terms of professional enlightenment and academic growth, but also to the institution. In addition, the sabbatical leave differs from other types of leaves in that it requires a definite period of prior consecutive service and a commitment to return to original service, accompanied with reports of the leave, which potentially increases the sense of loyalty and commitment to the institution and the efficacy of the leave in professional development.

According to Baldwin (1990), faculty professional career paths could be divided into three stages: junior, middle, and senior, throughout which a college professor's career evolves and changes. Various studies of faculty careers have identified numerous environmental factors that affect the academic career and faculty vitality, as "faculty change as they progress through the faculty ranks and as careers gradually place different demands on them" (Kalivoda, Sorrell, & Simpson, 1994, p. 255). According to Gooler (1991), a faculty career may move quickly in the beginning, slow in productivity following a tenure decision, and then encounter a period of non-productivity. In a similar framework, Knefelkamp (1990) described the professional career as one which embraced periods of intellectual rebirth followed by periods of harvest (application and

production) and gestation or dormancy where both the individual and intellect are in isolation to precede a period of rebirth.

In order for a faculty member to have a full and meaningful career life, it is both important and necessary to maintain high levels of faculty vitality and renew their professional skills in the course of their career evolution. Mechanisms must be configured to achieve those continuous quality indicators. Faculty development programs are typically designed to enhance faculty skills and to act as a fertilizer to encourage growth and productivity, whether in terms of quality teaching or research performance, of a professor's work. The sabbatical leave then can be one of the programs that are used to help faculty in enhancing their careers and maintaining a high level of quality.

In order to assist the academic and professional community in constructing a more thorough understanding of the sabbatical leave program, the current discussion was divided into three major domains: the history of the sabbatical leave, contemporary research on the sabbatical leave, and personal narratives on the sabbatical. Also offered is a discussion of the current state of the sabbatical leave when taking into consideration these domains of literature.

History of Sabbaticals

The origin of the sabbatical leave has been traced to Hebrew legend, and the concept has been detailed with mythological and religious significance. According to Eells and Hollis (1962), the term "sabbatical" came from "Sabbatun" (Latin), "Sabbaton" (Greek), or "Shabat" (Hebrew), the name of an ancient river in Media, which flowed for six days, and rested for the seventh. Based on this concept, there came the term "Sabbath," which referred to the seventh day of the week, set aside by the fourth Commandment as the Lord's Day for disciples to rest and worship

and observed by those of the Jewish and Christian faiths. The term "Sabbatical Year" was derived and later used in agriculture to mean "every seventh year," bearing a strong religious sense. According to Mosaic Law among the ancient Jews, in a sabbatical year the land and vineyards were to remain fallow and debtors were to be released. The specific law was founded on the tenet that God ordered the Israelites to observe a Sabbath for the Lord by resting their fields and vineyards every seventh year, and so when the seventh year came, "fallow land is plowed, tilled, the weeds kept down, but no crops raised" (Eells & Hollis, 1962, p. 5). From this agrarian concept rose the idea of resting every seventh or Sabbath year.

In the late-1800s, when the sabbatical leave was introduced in education, it carried the same concept of a break or leave every seventh year, "the professor plows and tills himself, but is not expected to produce a crop of students that year" (Eells & Hollis, 1962, p. 5). The notion of the sabbatical was clearly indicated as a periodic rest or break from a routine on the seventh year for the purpose of faculty rejuvenation and restoration (Zahorski, 1994). In practice, a sabbatical leave refers to a period of absence (a year or shorter time) for study, rest, or travel, given at intervals (originally every seventh year) to some college teachers or administrators at full or partial salary.

The earliest sabbatical leave program was established at Harvard University in 1880. Several different sources have given different accounts as to how and why such a leave of absence was started. According to The Oxford English Dictionary (1989), the Harvard College leaders decided, on May 30, 1880, that they would grant occasional leaves of absence for one year on half-pay, provided that no professors had such leave more often than once in seven years.

In his study of the sabbatical history, Zahorski (1994) found that in 1880 Harvard President Charles W. Eliot used the promise of every seventh year off as a lure to attract the

famous philologist, Charles Lanman, from Johns Hopkins University to join Harvard's faculty. Eells and Hollis (1962) gave a completely different account, in which he narrated that President Charles W. Eliot inaugurated the system of sabbatical at Harvard University in 1880 as a reform measure and was seen as one of the numerous innovations made in his 40 years as president of the University. In his annual report for the academic year 1879-1880, President Charles W. Eliot wrote "that previous experience of some two decades of unsatisfactory experimentation with leave of absence for faculty members had led to the plan adopted that year" (Eells & Hollis, 1962, p. 1). Regardless of the reason, Harvard took the lead in granting the sabbatical leave and formulated the first statement of a sabbatical plan which was found to be very simple, containing very few significant provisions (Cooper, 1932).

After Harvard University, in the middle of 1880s, two other universities on the East Coast, Cornell and Wellesley, established their systems of sabbatical leave. Wellesley College, third in order by date, was the first college for women to have such a leave. In the years that followed, five more private institutions, Columbia, Brown, Amherst, Dartmouth, and Stanford, and two other public universities, California and Illinois, followed suit and offered their sabbatical leave programs. By 1890, there were at least 10 higher education institutions that had recognized sabbatical leaves as a means for faculty development and should be given credits as the earliest pioneers in this phase of collegiate

> personnel policy, which has become increasingly important and more widely prevalent in recent years. (Eells & Hollis, 1962, p. 1)

The first two decades of the 20th century were also noted during this period, as 40 colleges and universities adopted sabbatical systems, making a total of 50, which Eells and Hollis classified as "pioneer" institutions with reference to the sabbatical leave. By the time Cooper

(1932) wrote his dissertation in the 1930s, 178 institutions had been identified to have started this practice for faculty development. After that, the number of institutions that offered such leaves increased dramatically, "with a majority of U.S. colleges and universities boasting sabbatical programs of one type or another"(Zahorski, 1994, p. 6). In 1982, Anderson and Atelsek reported that nearly all universities had sabbatical systems; 84% of all 4-year colleges and 64% of all 2-year colleges had instituted the leave programs. A report in the Digest of Education Statistics (1992) illustrated that of the approximately 3,400 private and public 2- and 4-year institutions in the United States, roughly 2,500 offer some type of sabbatical program.

Although sabbatical leave policies and practices vary considerably from institution to institution, periods of leave and compensation policies are more or less the same. As noted, when sabbaticals were first practiced at Harvard, it was a leave of absence for one year on half pay granted every seven years, which was and still is a popular choice for many institutions and faculty members. Later a variation on the full year at half pay was introduced, that is, a half year leave with full pay. According to Eells and Hollis (1962), about half of the institutions that offered the leave programs practiced both of these options. A faculty member could take either a one-year leave at half salary or one-half year of leave at full salary. However, some institutions (about a quarter) granted leave only for the first option. There were still others that practice the leave in different ways, as some provided three-fifths salary, a few two-thirds, and some others even provided a three-fourths salary for the full year leave.

Dumser (1991) praised another option of sabbatical

> leave developed by the Wilton (Connecticut) Public Schools called 'mini-sabbatical,' which was a 6-8-week leave hiatus from teaching duties...leaving the teacher free to work on a project that could not otherwise be completed outside the school year. (p. 77)

In general, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors are eligible for a sabbatical leave after service to an institution for six years. Some colleges and universities limit the leave only to associate and full professors, and there is a tendency to shorten the period of service to 3 or 4 years for shorter periods of leaves of absence (Eells & Hollis, 1962).

Contemporary Research on Sabbaticals

Data regarding the sabbatical leave program is limited, with most literature resulting from qualitative research, personal narratives, and opinions related to the leave programs. A growing concern expressed internally by campus administrators and externally by the public is the outcome or product of the sabbatical leave. Generally there is a lack of agreement and understanding about the intent of sabbatical experiences as related to purposes, benefits, and suggestions for the sabbatical as a mechanism for faculty development.

In addressing the importance of sabbatical leaves, Boening contended (1996) that as a practical means for faculty development, the sabbatical is paramount to maintaining a vibrant and effective higher education enterprise in all areas of teaching, research, and service. His study revealed that many faculty

> take advantage of sabbatical leaves not only to further explore their subject matter in their own discipline, but to learn how to be better teachers as well. (p. 9)

Boening studied the application and approval patterns of sabbaticals at the University of Alabama between 1986 and 1996. He found that the majority of sabbatical requests came from the College of Arts and Sciences, and that the College of Commerce and Business had the highest approval rates for sabbatical requests. He also found that 97% of those who had or were seeking external funding were approved for sabbatical leaves. For those who had a previous sabbatical,

Boening identified a strong, positive correlation (.82) with subsequent approval of a request. His analysis of the application patterns showed that 90% of the sabbatical recipients wished to take the leave for scholarship and research.

Miller and Kang (1998) considered the sabbatical "a key mechanism and incentive for faculty use" (p. 3) in career development. They studied the outcomes of sabbatical leaves completed at The University of Alabama, using a sample of 150 faculty who received a sabbatical leave during the period of 1989 to 1994. The researchers found no significant difference in research productivity for sabbatical recipients in the 3-year periods before and after the leave was taken, although they did notice a consistent and slight decrease in research productivity following the sabbatical. The data analysis of the perceptions of study participants indicated a positive attitude toward the leave, which may develop into an active stimulus to the enhancement of the morale of the faculty members in terms of teaching, research, and service. These benefits may in turn benefit both individuals and their employing institutions. Miller and Kang noted that most of the sabbatical recipients "felt more of an obligation to help their institution" (p. 12). These faculty also reported that after their leave they felt intellectually renewed in knowledge in their fields of study, teaching methods, and viewed themselves as better teachers who were eager to work with their students. They also identified perceptions of the respondents related to viewing themselves as better post-sabbatical scholars (85%), but noted that the participants did not see themselves as better academic citizens.

Gaziel (1995) studied the effect of a sabbatical year on teachers' professional identity, feelings of job burnout and intentions to leave either their workplace or the profession, by sampling 400 teachers from six educational districts in Israel during the 1991-1992 school year. The findings of the study demonstrated that the professional identity of teachers was negatively

and significantly correlated with job burnout; no significant correlation was found between teachers' professional identity and intention to leave the workplace; job burnout was positively and significantly correlated with intention to leave the workplace and the profession; and no significant correlation was found between intention to leave the workplace and intention to leave the profession. In his conclusion, Gaziel identified that a sabbatical leave in conjunction with a professional training program had great impact on strengthening the teachers' professional image, and reducing their feelings of job burnout and intention to leave their workplace or profession.

Sima and Denton (1995) studied the reasons for and products of faculty sabbatical leaves by examining data from 193 approved sabbatical applications and 125 post-sabbatical reports submitted between 1991 and 1993 at a public research university. They found that most faculty intended to use the sabbatical primarily as an opportunity to conduct research (49%) and to write (21%). The record of scholarly benefits identified in their study showed that the sabbatical was used primarily for increasing scholarly productivity. They listed tangible products from the post-sabbatical reports of 125 sabbatical recipients, which included: 42 books or manuscripts, 26 book chapters, 4 monographs, 91 published articles, 65 papers submitted for publication, over $1.3 million in secured research grants, 36 grants proposal submitted, 94 talks, presentations, or invited lectures, 13 new or revised courses developed, 2 music compositions, 1 conference and 1 analytical report delivered, all of which were directly attributed to sabbatical experiences. These products indicated that faculty carried out the activities and met the goals originally identified in their applications for the leave. The relatively small change Sima and Denton found between the intended sabbatical activity and the actual activity suggested that faculty carefully planned the use of their sabbatical leave. Their study also exposed needs for improvement, for instance, on the average, only about 3.8% of the institution's faculty were on sabbatical during any one year, and

of the total faculty on sabbatical, 68% were on leave for one semester. Sima and Denton suggested that efforts should be made to improve the ability to describe the sabbatical activities and their benefits to stakeholders, which they addressed as "an increasingly important element in retaining what is of value to academe" (p. 18).

As early as 1930s, Cooper (1932) studied the sabbatical leave and investigated the perceptions of both the administrators and faculty regarding the leave. His findings revealed that 90% of the college administrators held the opinion that 100% of the teachers were more valuable to the institution after sabbatical leave than before, and believed that the greatest advantages of the sabbatical were primarily professional and secondarily individual and institutional in character. Cooper identified a significant emphasis of the faculty who had the leave experience on the sabbatical practice as an important opportunity to study, carry on research, travel, or engage in a combination of these activities. In their opinion, sabbatical leave was considered an important professional advantage calculated to result in greater efficiency from both the personal and institutional points of view.

In his study, the three most frequently mentioned activities for teachers who had a doctoral degree were traveling, research, and writing and for those who had a master's degree the most common activities were studying for degree, traveling, and research. One of the significant findings in his study was that approximately one half of the teachers who studied for a degree while on leave received one at the close of the period. More than one half of the teachers who were granted a degree on the expiration of the leave received Doctoral degrees.

Narratives on the Sabbatical

A large portion of the literature regarding sabbatical leaves is in the form of personal narratives, in which sabbatical recipients wrote about their leaves from personal experiences. Nassau (1995), for example, took a year long sabbatical leave at half pay to begin full-time study toward a doctoral degree. Considering the benefits she earned from the year's leave, she contended that she had not only learned from the topics of discussion in the courses she had taken, but also from the way her professors practiced what they taught. At a time when teacher sabbaticals became more controversial as funds grew scarce at her institution, her sabbatical experience made her understand and believe that allowing teachers to take a year off was not a luxury as some people thought; it was a way to improve the quality of instruction. She suggested that teachers should plan sabbaticals that improve teaching, go on sabbaticals to become better teachers, and school boards should grant sabbaticals, because what she believed education needed was "a highly talented work force of professional educators to teach challenging subject matter" (p. 32).

After his sabbatical Franse (1994) reflected on his sabbatical experience as having a rejuvenating effect. He described changes that occurred when he took the leave to study for a master degree, noting that the experience was "not as taxing as he expected but ended up as an enjoyable educational experience" (p. 167). He found that the most rewarding part of the sabbatical was the time to read, to write, and to reflect about course curriculum and life value, and he highly recommended that teachers take sabbaticals for instructional improvement.

In his report about sabbaticals as practiced in Colorado, Lively (1994) described a highly publicized controversy over and suspicion about paid leave for faculty and administrators. He cited several examples which showed that scholars insisted sabbaticals are necessary to

scholarship, because "writing is a solitary task... and it is best done without frequent interruption from telephone calls, committee, meetings, and teaching duties" (p. A16). According to his report, Dr. Deborah Hayes, who taught musicology on the Boulder Campus of the University of Colorado, visited Australia during her sabbatical leave. After she returned from her trip, she wrote a biography of Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe and completed a bibliography of his works, which, she claimed, would never have been possible without a year-long leave. In addressing the importance of the sabbatical, she wrote in defense of the leave that

> It is part of civilization to leave a record,....Scholarship is so much a question of categorizing and making sense out of little bits of information. It is what we owe to our society. (p. A17)

Dumser (1991), after her sabbatical leave, identified the leave as a creative, rewarding professional development experience for teachers, and a fresh, vital approach to staff development. She took a short-term sabbatical for the purpose of refining her experience as a cooperative learning trainer and practitioner, and returned to the classroom a better person and a better teacher, armed with new knowledge and energized by a new pride in her profession. She thought that the sabbatical experience had been a time of great professional growth and personal rejuvenation, the most creative of in-service programs, and she suggested that the sabbatical would bring long-term benefits not only to the participants but also to the school district.

From his sabbatical experience Reynolds (1990) felt deeply that a sabbatical leave was both a privilege and an obligation, and he believed that the sabbatical was a positive experience for him and for his employer. He argued that failure to take a leave was a detriment to the college, to the extent that a break for research, study, or rest was necessary to the continued effectiveness of the scholar-teacher.

Burke (1990), a high school English teacher, took a one-year sabbatical leave for the purpose of learning a new language. The leave of absence in Germany, during which she was free from the obligations of a daily routine, not having to worry about lesson plans or essays piled on her desk, enabled her to achieve the goals she had set for herself, and widened the opening of her window to the world. She felt that as a re-awakening her sabbatical year gave her a richness of experience that she had not even dared to imagine, and filled her days with energy, in which there was always discovery of new interest for both her life and professional career. She returned from Germany to her work feeling a new bond with her students and a new understanding of what the process of learning involved.

Bauer (1988), having worked all his professional career in community colleges, spent a six-month sabbatical leave "looking for the future of America's community colleges" (p. 34) in order to find whether or not some critics' prediction about America's community colleges was correct. During the leave, he visited 12 leading community and junior colleges nationwide to assess the current health of the community college movement. As a result of his study, he found that the 12 community colleges examined during his sabbatical were maintaining a balance between being excellent and being comprehensive, and identified a promising future at these colleges. His findings confirmed the values of his sabbatical leave and helped him develop a more positive outlook of community colleges.

Several other sabbatical reports identified the accountability of the paid leave based on the fulfillment of the purposes set in the sabbatical applications. Leavitt (1991), a college faculty member, reported on his sabbatical project in Bolivia, in which he shared ideas about bilingual and bicultural education in indigenous communities and helped with the activities of the Andean Oral History Workshop. Lundgren (1991), a secondary school biology teacher who took a sabbatical

journey into a biosphere inhabited by crowds of mysterious and astounding microbes, presented her research results on photosynthetic, carbon monoxide utilizing bacteria. In her sabbatical report, she discussed applications of the research and offered three sets of experimental procedures and data that students can analyze to determine which bacterium from a soil sample quickly uses carbon monoxide.

Saucedo (1991), a professor at Cerritos College in California, conducted a study during his sabbatical leave to examine the performance of Puente Project students compared to that of Mexican-American students in community colleges. The findings confirmed the effectiveness of the Project in improving the academic achievement levels of Mexican-American students, and the goals and objectives of the sabbatical leave were met. His post sabbatical report described in detail that as a result of his sabbatical leave his college benefited from the counseling and teaching experience he learned from visiting other colleges. He also shared with his colleagues new ideas, procedures, and methods in counseling, and he believed that his students benefited immediately from a Career Planning class he taught which addressed the needs of the Mexican-American student and the issues of college survival skills and cultural needs to help in the selection of a career.

Discussion

Sabbatical leaves certainly have a place, historically justified, in higher education when viewed as a form of faculty development. Rarely in research or in personal narratives is any negative light cast on the leave program. When disparaging comments are issued toward sabbaticals, they are usually viewed within the context of administrators taking, or more appropriately, abusing sabbaticals as they depart senior positions and 'return' to faculty status.

An excellent research project in this direction would the examination of current popular literature or news reports on the sabbatical leave, identifying what the general public thinks about the sabbatical leave and what types of reports are currently being written about sabbaticals.

Public attacks on sabbatical leaves, like any other area of college management, suggests that some of what Clark Kerr referred to as a 'critical mass' may be assembling on specific issues. Similar to public outrage over remediation coursework in some systems and athletic programs in others, sabbaticals are seldom understood or welcomed for more information by those outside of the academy. Sabbaticals seem to assume a developmental approach toward life and professional development, a concept increasingly ignored in the customer-service mentality of the contemporary college consumer.

Sabbaticals can make a difference in faculty career life-stages, as illustrated in so many different personal narratives. But, in order for a future generation of scholars to enjoy a leave program such as the sabbatical, abuses must be minimized and real efforts must be undertaken to demonstrate in quantifiable terms the benefits to both individuals and institutions of sabbatical leaves. Failure to do so will result in a slow, continued degradation of public confidence in higher education, particularly sabbatical leaves.

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